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SUBJECT: ISRAELI PRACTICES IN THE WEST BANK, GAZA AND GOLAN
- FOURTH COMMITTEE DEBATE

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¶1. SUMMARY: The UN General Assembly's Fourth Committee met November 9 - 10 to debate the annual "Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories" (aka the Special Committee). The debate included statements from 27 countries (primarily Arab League and Organization of the Islamic Conference members) in addition to the chair of the Special Committee and the Palestinian Observer Mission. Most condemned Israel's "occupation," military offensives against Gaza and Lebanon, the construction of the separation barrier and settlements, and "collective punishment" imposed by Israel against Palestinians. Many also praised the findings of the Goldstone Report. Israel deemed the report biased, and stated that such reports do not do anything advance the peace process. Sweden, on behalf of the EU, reiterated a commitment to the peace process. Several countries criticized the UN secretariat for the late issuance of the report.

Report of the Special Committee

¶2. Chairperson of the Special Committee, Palitha T. B. Kohona of Sri Lanka, stated that that the committee examined the issue of human rights in the occupied territories by holding meetings in Cairo, Amman, and Damascus and found that the human rights situation continues to deteriorate. It cited as examples during the Israeli military operation in Gaza the use of white phosphorus munitions and the "targeting" of UNRWA facilities. Kohona said report emphasizes the "dramatic humanitarian impact of the populations living in the Gaza Strip." The report alleged that Israel did not allow the Special Committee access to "the occupied territories" which Israel controls.

General Debate

¶3. The Palestinian Observer Mission brought activists from the Israeli Coalition Against Home Demolition and Palestinians from East Jerusalem who had recently been evicted by the Israeli army to observe the committee. The Palestinians accused Israel of "a brutal military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip, resulting in serious human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law - war crimes," as concluded in the Goldstone Report. Restrictions on movement, expansion of settlements and the checkpoints that restrict the movement of persons and into and out of the West Bank were all cited as ongoing infringement of Palestinian rights. The Palestinian Observer Mission called for the establishment of an independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

14. Israel noted the biased nature of the report, stating that it was "part of a well-calculated and systematic political campaign designed to vilify Israel and the right of Israel's citizens to live in peace and security". Israel stated that the report failed to include any mention of the rockets fired on Israeli towns and villages since 2001 or the military build-up of Hamas via Iran's shipping of arms to Gaza. Israel reiterated its commitment to protecting human rights and to reaching a permanent peace agreement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will permit both peoples to live in peace, security and dignity.

15. Syria stated that the report, "for the fortieth consecutive year," drew attention to Israel's deliberate and systematic destruction of the legal character of the 'occupied Syrian Golan.' Syria said that Israel destroyed Syrian villages, seized Syrian properties, plundered natural wealth, diverted water, imposed exorbitant taxes, refused to declare where mines are buried and is burying nuclear waste in the area. Syria said Israel takes these actions "in a culture of impunity" and acts "above the law".

16. Iran stated that the highest priority of the UN should be ending Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, and reversing the declining humanitarian and human rights situation and grave violations of Palestinian rights. It accused the Israelis of a "massacre of Gaza," citing the targeting of civilian populations, the use of white phosphorus munitions and the blockade on imports of humanitarian goods. Iran said that the Goldstone report reaffirmed the findings of the Special Committee and that durable peace in the region is only possible through the establishment of Palestinian state.

17. Lebanon noted the ability of the Israeli army to act with

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impunity in the occupied territories and called for a "just and lasting resolution of the Middle East conflict based on relevant Security Council resolutions." Lebanon condemned the "blockade" of Gaza and called for an opening of all border crossings.

18. Other Arab states: The Arab states were uniform in their call for an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories and in saying that Israel commits human rights violations. Many cited the Goldstone Report as supporting the results of the Special Committee's report. Qatar rejected the Israeli position that it is fighting terrorism, noting that most of the casualties were unarmed civilians. Qatar also reiterated that "the right to fight for liberation from foreign occupation is legitimate...and cannot be equated with military aggression by the occupation forces." Jordan noted that the situation in the occupied territories had become a "tragedy" with the ongoing blockades, calling the Gaza strip "a huge prison." Egypt, speaking on behalf of the NAM, said it "will continue to support the Palestinian people in order to bring an end to Israel's unlawful occupation that began in 1967, to apply justice and to fight impunity." The other Arab League members who spoke during the debate were Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

19. OIC members: Senegal called on Israel to end the blockade of the occupied territories and warned that this blockade could cause an "unprecedented humanitarian disaster". Malaysia said that a lack of territorial contiguity between parts of the occupied Palestinian Territory, expansion of settlements, demolitions of Palestinian houses, obstacles to movement, lack of access to employment, health care and education, and Israeli detention policies are among the issues that the Special Committee should monitor. Pakistan noted "a serious deterioration of the human rights situation." Pakistan said that the impact of Israel's policies is felt on the ground in terms of lives and livelihoods, and has a negative impact on the peace process.

Sudan and Bangladesh also delivered remarks.

¶10. Sweden, on behalf of the EU, restated a commitment to a comprehensive peace settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of international law and a two-state solution. The EU is concerned by settlement activities, home demolition and evictions, including in East Jerusalem. The EU "remains gravely concerned by the humanitarian situation in Gaza" and called for the immediate and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid.

¶11. African views: Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa all called for an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state. South Africa noted the report and called for an end to Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people including the blockade, settlement building, and demolition of Palestinian houses. Tanzania called on Israel to stop the construction of the separation barrier and to end the blockade of Gaza.

¶12. Other views: Cuba called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and noted the increasing number of poor people in the Gaza Strip due to Israeli blockades and aggression. Venezuela stated that Israeli impunity is the "main obstacle for peace." Both noted that Israel is able to continue its practices due to the U.S. veto or threat of veto in the Security Council. DPRK called for an end to Israeli aggression and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

¶13. Right of Reply: At the end of the general debate Syria stated that Israel's claim that it protects human rights is "nonsense" and that the Goldstone report shows the world the war crimes that Israel committed. Syria questioned why Israel did not allow the Special Committee access to the occupied territories. It further stated that the rockets launched against Israel were a reaction to the illegal occupation. The Palestinians stated that Israel does not allow its Arab citizens or Palestinian refugees human and political rights and noted that the settlers "get away with murder because the victims are Arabs" and that Israel continues to act with impunity. The Palestinians stated their intent to continue coming to the UN for redress of issues for the Palestinian people.

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